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MAX BAUCUS
United States Senator from Montana

PRESS RELEASE

**BAUCUS TO BRING HHS SECY TO LIBBY
MARCH 10**

*Senator, Mike Leavitt To Host Community Meeting On Health Care For
Residents*

February 28, 2006

(Washington, D.C.) – U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt has accepted Montana Senator Max Baucus' invitation to attend a community meeting in Libby on Friday, March 10 to help address ongoing health care and redevelopment efforts following years of asbestos exposure by W.R. Grace.

Baucus invited Secretary Leavitt to Libby to show the Bush Administration official firsthand the "widespread and dire health care situation" in the small northwestern Montana community. Baucus is asking Leavitt to help provide more resources for health care to residents who are sick from asbestos exposure.

The trip will be Leavitt's second – he visited Libby at Baucus' request in 2004 as then-EPA Administrator. Baucus is the top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over the health care agency. At Leavitt's confirmation hearing before the Finance Committee in February 2005, Baucus extracted a promise from Leavitt, a former Utah Governor, to visit to Libby again.

Baucus has been working to, among other things, secure a commitment from HHS to invest greater resources in Libby, ensure that any asbestos bill in the Congress provides Libby residents with the compensation they need and deserve, and establish a new research facility to develop innovative asbestos exposure treatment options.

Baucus said he also wants to direct more federal resources to the Center for Asbestos Related Diseases, which he helped establish in 2000. The CARD clinic has done a good job providing health care and screening for Libby residents, he said, but noted additional federal dollars are needed to provide more and better care.

"This is a great opportunity for Secretary Leavitt to see firsthand the devastation that W.R. Grace has inflicted on the people of Libby," Baucus said. "I'm committed to doing all I can to help get Libby residents get the health care they need and deserve. Folks are dying in Libby. It's that simple. And we must do more to help them."

Since news reports first brought the tragedy in Libby to light in 1999, Baucus has helped secure millions of federal dollars for cleanup, health care, and economic development. He was the first high-ranking elected official to visit Libby in 2000, and the March 10 trip will be Baucus' 17th visit since then.

Although Baucus said the March 10 schedule is still being finalized, a community meeting will be held at the Libby City Hall, Ponderosa Room, 2:30 p.m. MST. For further information, people are asked to contact Baucus' Kalispell office at (406) 756-1150.

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EPA Administrator Leavitt To Visit Libby With Baucus

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Mike Leavitt will make good on his promise to U-S Senator Max Baucus and visit Libby on May 26, an on-site tour Baucus hopes will help jolt asbestos contamination cleanup efforts there. Baucus put his support behind Leavitt's nomination to head the E-P-A last year after receiving a commitment that the former Utah Governor will visit Libby personally and help the town recover from years of asbestos exposure from the W-R Grace vermiculite mine. "I'm glad to announce that Governor Leavitt will visit Libby, because it will be so important for him to see personally, with his own eyes, the devastation asbestos has caused there," Baucus said. "I want Governor Leavitt to see and feel the spirit and courage folks have in Libby. I want him to look into their eyes, like I have, and hear their stories." Baucus said he would like for Leavitt to, among other things, tour of the Center for Asbestos Related Diseases – a clinic Baucus helped establish with federal funds – and hold town hall meeting. Baucus has been critical of the E-P-A's slow cleanup progress, noting the agency has identified more than 1,300 properties in Libby that still require cleanup and that the agency's timeframe for cleaning up the town has been pushed back – from 2004 to 2008. Having been in Libby for three years, Baucus says it's unacceptable that the agency has completed only 10 percent of the cleanup work needed to give the town a clean bill of health. Baucus said he is concerned that no funds have been set aside for Troy, which has been contaminated by asbestos